

Rural Transportation Planning Workshops

Alabama Workshop

Including

Florida Georgia Louisiana Mississippi South Carolina

FINAL DRAFT

Summer 1999

Dye Management Group, Inc.

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Road mileage data included in this report is from the Federal Highway Administration, 1996, and can be accessed at www.fhwa.dot.gov/ohim/1996/section5.html.

Federal Highway Administration

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Federal Highway Administration

Rural Transportation Planning Workshops

Alabama Workshop

1.0 Introduction

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), assisted by Dye Management Group, Inc., conducted a series of regional rural transportation planning workshops from October 1998 through July 1999. The Alabama Department of Transportation hosted the seventh regional workshop on May 5-6, 1999, in Montgomery.

These workshops were structured to allow the exchange of success stories and dialogue between neighboring states and their representatives on how to make rural transportation planning effective. In addition, the workshops were used to assemble information on how local elected officials are involved in the statewide transportation planning process. Officials from Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina, including planning representatives, district/county engineers, local elected officials, rural planning organizations, economic development agencies, tribal governments, departments of transportation, and rural transit operators were invited to attend. The information gathered at the Alabama workshop is presented for each state individually. Overall workshop findings and conclusions follow the state summaries.

1.1 Objectives

The purpose of the workshops was to foster dialogue and the exchange of ideas, not formal presentations. The objectives of the workshops were to:

- Explore and promote effective ways to involve rural officials in the statewide transportation planning process.
- Enable participants to share experiences in rural transportation planning and programming.
- Build relationships among participants that can form the basis for future cooperation and coordination.
- Identify the most effective roles and responsibilities for rural transportation providers and users.

- Determine rural transportation needs and issues that are being addressed by planning and programming.
- Identify best practice planning techniques used in developing successful rural projects.
- Obtain information for a report to Congress on how responsive state transportation
 plans and the statewide transportation planning process are to rural concerns and how
 rural officials are involved in the planning process.

These objectives were achieved by working through an agenda of discussion topics. Workshop participants were asked to come prepared to provide input around specific questions that they were given in advance.

1.2 Discussion Topics

Five principal discussion topics were addressed in the workshop. Knowledgeable individuals from each state, from both the state department of transportation perspective and the local rural perspective, were asked to address these discussion topics. The topics were:

• The Process and the Outcome: How Planning for Rural Areas Is Conducted

This topic covered the following questions:

- How is planning for rural areas conducted?
- How are rural transportation needs addressed in the development of the statewide transportation improvement program?
- How are rural officials involved in decision making?
- What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses in your state?

• Jurisdictional Roles, Responsibilities, and Funding

This topic covered the following questions:

- What are the jurisdictional roles and responsibilities in your state for planning, programming, and funding improvements in rural areas?
- How are plan decisions funded?

• Integration/Coordination with Other Plans

This topic covered the following questions:

How are local/regional plans coordinated with other plans?

How are local rural goals balanced against regional/statewide goals and objectives?

• Success Stories

This topic covered the following question:

- What success stories do you have of innovative programs and projects that address rural needs?

Other Issues

This topic covered the following question:

- What are the major rural transportation issues facing rural areas in your state, for all modes?

1.3 Participants

State departments of transportation were solicited to host the rural transportation planning workshops. Based upon the response, host states were identified and nearby states were then invited to attend.

Knowledgeable individuals, from both the state department of transportation perspective and the local rural perspective, were invited to attend the workshops. The objective was to have approximately five people from each state, representing a variety of rural transportation stakeholders, actively participate in the workshop forum. Participants included local, state, and federal planning representatives; county engineers and commissioners; local elected officials; councils of governments; regional planning organizations; economic development agencies; tribal governments; and rural transit operators. National organizations represented at the workshops included the:

- Community Transportation Association of America.
- Federal Highway Administration.
- Federal Transit Administration.
- National Association of Counties.
- National Association of County Engineers.
- National Association of Development Organizations.

The local elected officials who participated in the workshops included rural mayors, county commissioners, judges/county executives, public works directors, trustees, and former state legislators.

1.4 Report Structure

The format of this report is based on the workshop objectives and topic areas, as follows:

- The Rural Planning Process.
- Programming and Funding for Rural Area Decisions.
- Major Planning Issues.
- Identified Strengths and Weaknesses.
- Success Stories.

Each of the participating states are addressed in turn. A list of workshop participants and maps of each of the states are included in the attachments.

2.0 Alabama

Alabama contains 193,245 lane miles of roads, 149,546 lane miles of which are rural, and 7,903 of these rural miles are on the National Highway System. Eighty-seven percent of rural roads are locally owned. Alabama's rural transportation planning process is considered to be a blend of top-down and bottom-up methods.

2.1 The Rural Planning Process

Alabama has 12 regional planning commissions, seven of which include metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), that were created in the late 1960s. The regional commissions conduct comprehensive and transportation planning, and most have more than one planner on staff. Many commissions work with the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT) and other state agencies in the following areas:

- Safe communities and safe boating programs
- Surface transportation safety grant and construction programs
- Surface transportation planning, training, and technical assistance programs
- Transit and special purpose programs
- Community and environmental programs

The regional planning commissions do not receive transportation planning funds from ALDOT, and rely on funding from other agencies and local government contributions.

Most transportation planning is done by ALDOT through its nine districts and in conjunction with the state's 67 counties. Counties are not required to create a long-range transportation plan, but must submit annual work programs to receive their share of state funding. The county road system is under the jurisdiction of the county commissioner and commission, which report to the county engineer. The county engineer then coordinates with the ALDOT district engineers. This is where many of the decisions affecting the rural system are made.

ALDOT's principal planning venue is a five-year state construction program. The construction program is overseen by a 14-member joint highway committee, which includes a house representative and senator from each congressional district, and primarily covers the state system and earmarked funds. The rural program is generally based on Alabama's four-lane corridor planning.

Principal Rural Planning Activities

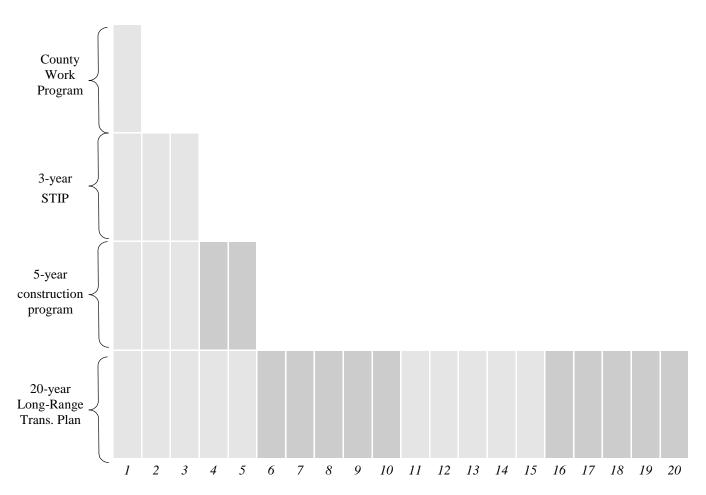
Counties submit their annual work programs to ALDOT by April 30 for approval.
 The annual work programs are for informational purposes and do not become part of

a statewide plan.

- ALDOT drafts the five-year construction program in accordance with the 20-year long-range policy plan. The first three years of the program are the statewide transportation improvement program (STIP).
- The joint highway committee reviews and tentatively approves the construction program.
- ALDOT conducts public meetings to gather input on the construction program, and incorporates any changes.
- The joint highway committee approves the construction program.

Exhibit 2a illustrates Alabama's transportation planning process.

Exhibit 2a: Rural Planning Integration in Alabama



Local Elected Official Involvement

Local elected officials may participate in the rural transportation planning process by working with their regional planning commissions and developing county plans. They may also attend public meetings sponsored by ALDOT on the construction program.

2.2 Programming and Funding for Rural Area Decisions

Alabama has an 18-cent gas tax and shares 8.9 cents of it with its counties, the most of all states in the south. This funding is restricted for use on highways and bridges.

ALDOT also suballocates \$500,000 in federal funding to each county annually, which can be spent at the discretion of the county commission provided that 15% is used for bridges. In order to receive their \$500,000, the counties must develop annual work programs. Each county is required to have a licensed engineer, who is partially subsidized by ALDOT, to administer the county program. ALDOT suballocates funding to small cities, too, in a proportion equal to that of MPOs. Counties can also levy a special option sales tax for transportation purposes.

ALDOT does not provide funds for public transportation and transit.

2.3 Major Planning Issues

The following major rural planning issues were identified during the workshop.

• Not all of Alabama's MPOs participate in a regional planning commission.

Seven MPOs belong to regional planning commissions, with varying degrees of integration in their plans and services. However, there is little planning and transit coordination between the other four MPOs and their surrounding regions. This leaves some counties on their own to deal with air quality and congestion problems.

Transit funding is scarce and often inflexible.

Federal transit funding can only be applied towards capital costs when many regions need money to establish and expand transportation services. As a means of bypassing this requirement, federal funds are often transferred to Section 5311 for operations and administration costs. Because ALDOT does not fund public transportation, matches for federal funds must come from local sources. Due to this, only 48 counties are able to support transit systems.

• There is no state support for transit. Public transportation relies on federal funding, local matches, and contract money for operations.

A bill is currently in the legislature that proposes a constitutional amendment to direct 2% of transportation funds to go to public transit. It is not yet known whether this would come from or be in addition to the funding that counties already receive.

2.4 Identified Strengths and Weaknesses

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during the workshop.

Strengths

- County elected officials are directly involved in project selection for a large portion of funds spent on the rural system.
- ALDOT maintains open channels of communication and provides regional planning commissions with the opportunity to share issues and feedback.
- For many years, Alabama has been in the top five states for obligating federal aid funds. The state also requests and receives additional obligation authority from states that are unable to use their funds.
- The Alabama Transportation Planners' Association provides software and planning training opportunities, operates a peer-to-peer planners network, and coordinates with ALDOT and the FHWA.
- Every county in Alabama is a member of a regional planning commission, and the Alabama Association of Regional Councils works closely with local elected officials. The association assists with the identification of regional needs and coordination of planning efforts.
- ALDOT has taken the lead in developing and expanding geographic information systems (GIS) capabilities, coordinating the census, distributing data, and conducting training and educational programs.

Weaknesses

- If a county fails to provide an annual work program to ALDOT by April 30 of each year, it loses its \$500,000 federal suballocation. Due to a shortage of staff and other obligations, some counties cannot meet this annual deadline.
- Seven of Alabama's 11 MPOs belong to a regional planning commission. There is little planning and transit coordination between the other four MPOs and their surrounding regions.

- Transit operators expressed concern that the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) is a "non-player" that focuses too much on regulations and nonessential details than on cooperating with other agencies and developing plans.
- There is no formal statewide forum for counties and municipalities to discuss transportation issues and integrate plans. County and city plans are often independent of each other.

2.5 Success Stories

- One regional planning commission has coordinated transit services so that a
 community college automotive classroom facility, which was only being used for
 night courses, expanded its purpose. It now provides maintenance services for transit
 vehicles and state trooper patrol cars during the day.
- The Appalachian Highway Corridors in northern Alabama are the result of regional coordination and collaboration with the state. Regions along the corridors assisted ALDOT in the collection and analysis of data regarding the selection of the preferred alternative for the original route. The cities along these corridors are now developing growth plans.

3.0 Florida

Florida contains 246,545 lane miles of roads, 137,136 lane miles of which are rural, and 9,517 of these rural miles are on the National Highway System. Eighty-seven percent of rural roads are locally owned. Florida's rural transportation planning process is considered to be bottom-up.

3.1 The Rural Planning Process

Florida has 11 regional planning councils that coordinate with local governments to conduct most of the state's transportation planning for all modes. The board of each council must be chaired by local elected officials so that they are at the forefront of transportation issues.

State law requires long-range local, regional, and statewide comprehensive plans, with updates every five years. State law also mandates planning for and the coordination of all transit services, which is done by Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged through its local coordinating boards in each regional planning commission.

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) is highly decentralized and the central office is mostly policy and program oriented. FDOT is divided into seven districts, not including an eighth district for turnpikes, which are fairly autonomous in their planning and activities. Each district has a planning office, which is in close contact with local governments. Rail and aviation are centralized, although rail improvements are handled locally.

Principal Rural Planning Activities

- Local jurisdictions hold public hearings to identify transportation needs, prioritize projects, and develop comprehensive plans.
- Regional planning councils approve all local plans and make recommendations to the FDOT district offices.
- In conjunction with the five-year STIP, the FDOT central office develops a ten-year resource allocation plan and updates it annually. Funding allocations for program categories are provided to each district.
- Based on resource allocation plan and local input, FDOT district offices select projects for their yearly plan update. The central FDOT office then prioritizes projects statewide and updates the STIP according to the district plans.
- Local jurisdictions update their long-range comprehensive plans every five years.

Exhibit 3a illustrates Florida's transportation planning process.

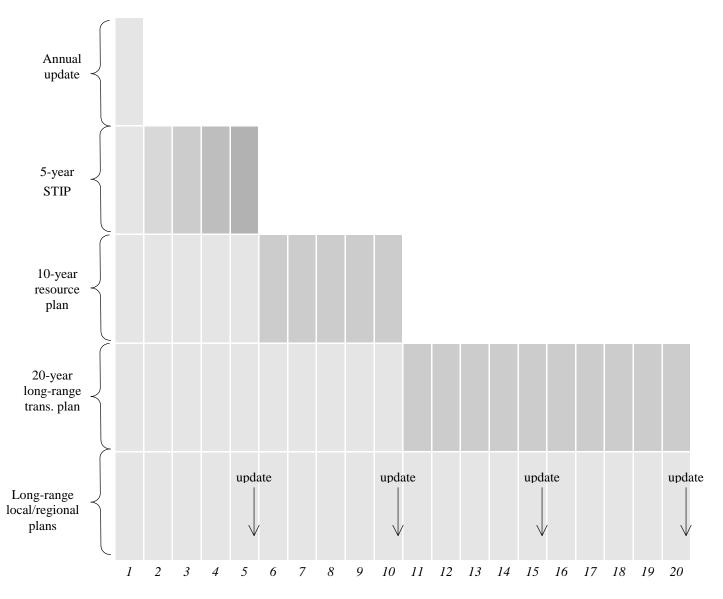


Exhibit 3a: Rural Planning Integration in Florida

Local Elected Official Involvement

Local elected officials are required to be involved in the transportation planning process by serving on the supervisory board of their regional planning council and on the local coordinating board of the Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged. In addition, they can assist with planning activities in their local jurisdictions, prioritize projects and needs at the regional level, and conduct and provide input at public meetings.

3.2 Programming and Funding for Rural Area Decisions

Most funding is allocated to the FDOT districts through two programs, capacity improvements and statewide/system preservation projects. Resurfacing projects are prioritized by each district according to their pavement management system, and larger projects are prioritized regionally and then statewide.

FDOT shares 1 cent of the gas tax with counties. Although not fully utilized, counties can levy a gas tax up to 6 cents for transportation purposes. Federal aid is distributed by application; counties submit lists of projects they want, and funding is approved based on availability. The legislature recently passed the Small County Assistance Program, which will streamline the county funding process. FDOT conducts an annual review of funds spent in each county to assure that they receive within 80% of their fair share over a tenyear time frame.

The Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged receives 15% of FDOT grant funds. The formula used by the commission to distribute this money is 25% population, 25% service area, 25% road miles, and 25% number of trips provided. The commission also provides local coordinating boards with planning assistance grants totaling approximately \$1.3 million a year.

3.3 Major Planning Issues

The following major rural planning issues were identified during the workshop.

 Florida's growth management policies set rigid standards for levels of service in developing areas.

The growth management policies have been ineffective due to the large amount of rapid growth and lack of funding to achieve the levels of service. As an unintended result, development has "leapfrogged" further out and created additional urban sprawl. The state is attempting to control this sequence of events and improve the growth, development, and infrastructure policies.

• Due to a labor shortage, businesses are recruiting employees in rural regions, who often cannot commute to urban areas.

The Commuter Assistance Program was created to fund agencies that help transport employees to their jobs, coordinate transportation services, and link employers with transit providers for specific services.

• FDOT does not delineate responsibilities for the state and county road systems, so maintenance for state roads that do not serve a statewide purpose is problematic.

FDOT evaluated the systems and tried to assign responsibilities to the state and districts in the early 1990s, but abandoned this effort.

3.4 Identified Strengths and Weaknesses

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during the workshop.

Strengths

- There is high turnout for public hearings on transportation issues; typically 100 people attend each meeting.
- Due to the Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged, all counties have some level of public transportation and there is no duplication of services.
- FDOT has an advisory position in the Office of Tourism, Trade, and Economic Development. As development projects are created, FDOT makes impact statements and recommends improvements to the plan.
- FDOT solicits recommendations from an aviation committee which includes airport managers, local governments, airline operators, pilots, citizens, and other agencies – before allowing airport development.

Weaknesses

- It is difficult to predict development in and plan for rural areas very far into the future. Although rural regional plans are created, they may not be used.
- Rural counties must share a small pot of funding and have few projects. With 97% of the population living in urban areas, rural counties cannot generate the required revenue through a county gas tax.

3.5 Success Stories

- The Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged recently received the Davis Productivity Award based on its statutory role in overseeing the Transportation Disadvantaged Program, which realized a cost savings of \$154 million over the past three years in the implementation of coordinated public transportation. The commission's activities include the following:
 - Establish statewide objectives for transportation services.
 - Identify barriers to the coordination and accessibility of transportation services.
 - Serve as a clearinghouse for information on transportation disadvantaged services, funding sources, innovations, and coordination efforts.
 - Assist communities in the design of transportation systems to serve the disadvantaged.

- Develop standards for coordination, operation, costs, and services.
- Prepare a statewide five-year plan that addresses the problems and need of the transportation disadvantaged.

The commission also received a Rural Florida Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) grant from the Federal Transit Administration for a project that involved six counties and several other organizations, and promoted interconnectivity and the coordination of planning functions.

• Florida's regional planning commissions enable FDOT to have decentralized planning efforts through their close connection to local governments.

4.0 Georgia

Georgia contains 234,292 lane miles of roads, 174,610 lane miles of which are rural, and 10,197 of these rural miles are on the National Highway System. Eighty-one percent of rural roads are locally owned. Georgia's rural transportation planning process is considered to be a blend of top-down and bottom-up methods.

4.1 The Rural Planning Process

Georgia has 16 regional development centers that are owned and operated by counties and municipalities, and are overseen by advisory boards with local officials. Each center hires its own staff and planners to develop comprehensive plans with transportation elements. The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) provides each regional development center approximately \$200,000 a year to conduct planning activities, which must be matched at 20%. The regions receive planning assistance from GDOT's 12 district engineers. Each GDOT district also has a rural transit coordinator, whose duties include visiting each county in their area at least once a year to explain the programs and funding available to them.

GDOT is in the process of reorganizing and passing on transportation planning responsibilities to the regional development centers. Currently the only planning documents prepared are for statewide purposes – the construction program and long-range policy plan. Counties and municipalities are required to have comprehensive plans, including a transportation element, with updates every five years. These plans are not incorporated into the statewide plan. There is not formal planning at the regional level, although GDOT reviews regional plans unofficially.

Principal Rural Planning Activities

- Local plans are developed and approved by each county commission, and updated every five years.
- Many regional development centers work with their GDOT district engineer(s) to identify and prioritize projects.
- Based on input from its district engineers and elected officials, GDOT develops the six-year construction work program; the first three years of the program is the STIP. Senior managers in the GDOT Office of Planning make final project decisions for rural regions.
- The construction program is forwarded to the transportation board for approval. The board consists of 11 members, one from each congressional district.

Exhibit 4a illustrates Georgia's transportation planning process.

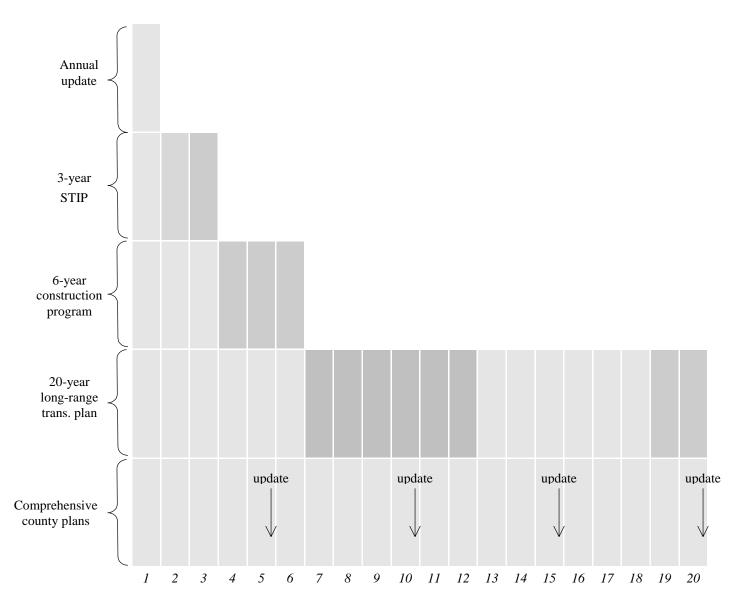


Exhibit 4a: Rural Planning Integration in Georgia

Local Elected Official Involvement

Local elected officials may participate in the rural transportation planning process by developing plans for their jurisdiction, and by joining their regional development center to integrate those plans and prioritize needs regionwide. Elected officials can also request that studies be conducted to address specific needs.

4.2 Programming and Funding for Rural Area Decisions

The majority of regional funding is from a special options sales tax. Georgia's 159 counties and 535 cities can also compete for about \$38 million a year in Local Assistance Road Program funding, which is distributed based on applications and a formula of road miles and population. In addition, about 30 counties have enacted a special local option sales tax for transportation purposes. Approximately \$28 million in scenic projects money is available by application to regions.

A popular funding source is the transportation activity enhancement program, which provides almost \$50 million each year on a competitive basis. Applications are screened by GDOT for technical aspects, a panel of multiple agencies ranks them, and then the transportation board makes the final selections. More than half of the applications approved are for pedestrian/bike projects. GDOT has developed a manual to assist organizations in developing their applications for this funding.

Gas taxes are not distributed to counties. State law prohibits gas tax revenue from being spent on non-road or bridge projects. The Governor's Road Improvement Program is funded through bonds, but at its current funding level will not be completed for another 30-40 years. GDOT occasionally dips into economic development funds when possible to accelerate the process.

GDOT is increasingly funding a higher percentage of projects, especially those that are backlogged. It is still unclear as to how funding will be allocated with the new roles of the regional development centers. In addition, the legislature recently passed a bill requiring that equal funding be distributed to each of the 11 congressional districts.

4.3 Major Planning Issues

The following major rural planning issues were identified during the workshop.

- Planning is reactive and not proactive. There is no prioritization of needs.
 - GDOT intends to improve their reactive planning method and lack of advance needs identification by better using the regional development centers. GDOT hopes to actively identify and prioritize needs through the centers instead of responding to requests for studies.
- A bill was recently passed requiring that equal transportation funding be distributed to Georgia's 11 congressional districts.

GDOT does not yet know how it will allocate funding according to this new requirement while providing fair shares to each regional development center and GDOT district. Complicating the problem, congressional districts do not correspond to other boundaries. For example, one district is a strip from Atlanta to Florida.

• The intermodal office plans for aviation, ports, public transit, and rail separately from the main highway division.

Planning for roads is done with some regard for other modes, but on a staff-level basis and not through an established process. GDOT hopes to better integrate the transportation divisions and their planning through its reorganization effort.

4.4 Identified Strengths and Weaknesses

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during the workshop.

Strengths

- GDOT has recognized the connection regional development centers have with local governments, and is reorganizing their planning process to better utilize that link.
- The Governor's Road Improvement Program of 14 four-lane corridors is connecting rural areas and increasing their economic development through improved accessibility. It has been credited with as many as 15,000 jobs.
- The regional development centers' plans are generally very comprehensive and include land use, housing, growth, transportation, and other elements.

Weaknesses

- There is little coordination between modes and between urban and rural regions.
- Some regional development centers' plans are lists of projects, and do not include policy.
- Local elected officials do not always provide GDOT with a true perspective of what
 citizens want, and often hear different opinions at public forums. For example,
 elected officials downplayed the desire for transit systems while public meetings
 proved otherwise.
- The stigma that public transportation is only for welfare recipients, the elderly, or the disabled hinders the integration of plans and funding.

4.5 Success Stories

• GDOT and Georgia Tech University have developed the Multimodal Transportation Planning Tool, a software program designed to analyze transportation systems across all modes in small cities and rural areas. Using existing data, the program:

- Incorporates multimodal features into standard highway projects.
- Prioritizes transportation projects.
- Determines whether multimodal options are feasible and warrant further study.
- Allows planners to conduct system-level analysis for all modes and spatial queries.

The software is currently being tested in some regions.

• GDOT's TEA 2000 Commission addresses future transportation needs and brings together stakeholders from business, finance, contracting, transit, environment, and various modes. Participants formed five subcommittees – economic development, energy efficiency, the environment, finance, and public involvement/relations – and had specific goals to accomplish. The commission hosted 15 forums across the state, with an independent facilitator from the University of Georgia's Institute of Public Affairs, to identify major rural issues. The results of the commission's work guided the development of the construction program and STIP.

5.0 Louisiana

Louisiana contains 127,338 lane miles of roads, 95,818 lane miles of which are rural, and 5,545 of these rural miles are on the National Highway System. Sixty-seven percent of rural roads are locally owned. Louisiana's rural transportation planning process is considered to be top-down.

5.1 The Rural Planning Process

Louisiana has scattered regional planning commissions and economic development councils with no formal transportation planning responsibilities. Some organizations conduct comprehensive planning independently, and there is no coordination or integration of plans with the state.

The Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (LDOTD) is divided into nine districts, including New Orleans, and conducts all transportation planning. LDOTD is overseen by the legislature and not a transportation commission. The department recently reorganized to become more dependent on district input; the responsibility for identifying projects falls heavily upon the district administrator. Input is then forwarded to the central office for final program development and submittal to the legislature.

The long-range transportation plan is both project- and policy-based. It consists of three levels of projects, with the third tier having no identified funding.

Principal Rural Planning Activities

- LDOTD identifies top transportation needs by district and category including capacity, reconstruction, widening, and overlay – and distributes the lists to the districts.
- The districts compile a preliminary ranking of needs and projects using cost-benefit ratios and other criteria.
- Public hearings are held in each district by the state legislature to discuss the transportation needs and projects. Most participants are local elected officials. The meetings are transcripted, with copies forwarded to the central office.
- Based on the districts' input, LDOTD develops an eight-year program of improvements; the first three years are the STIP.
- LDOTD submits the program to the legislature for approval. Once approved, legislators cannot add or remove projects.

Exhibit 5a illustrates Louisiana's transportation planning process.

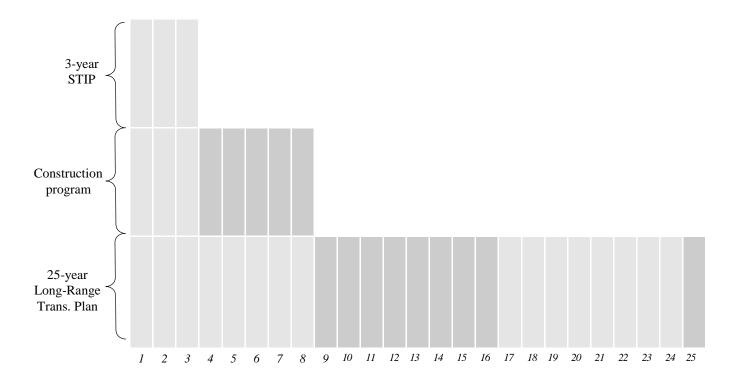


Exhibit 5a: Rural Planning Integration in Louisiana

Local Elected Official Involvement

Local elected officials may participate in the rural transportation planning process by attending the annual legislative meetings for the STIP. At these meetings they can recommend projects, point out needs, and provide input on projects already listed in the STIP.

5.2 Programming and Funding for Rural Area Decisions

Revenue from Louisiana's 16-cent gas tax goes into a trust fund, which is shared between LDOTD, the state patrol, and parishes. The parishes receive 1 cent of the gas tax, which some use to accelerate state projects. Parishes can also levy a special local option sales tax for transportation purposes.

Rural regions receive most of their project funding through the overlay program, which allocates money to each district based on vehicle miles traveled. Rural regions also receive \$150,00 a year for transit, which is used to buy vehicles.

5.3 Major Planning Issues

The following major rural planning issues were identified during the workshop.

• Elected officials have a high level of influence in transportation planning.

LDOTD is governed by the legislature, not a transportation commission or commissioner. The legislature holds meetings in each district to gather input and discuss needs, determines funding allocations, and approves the STIP. In order to remove an element of politics from the planning process, elected officials cannot add or remove projects from the STIP once they have approved it.

• Planning is generally project-based and not guided by policy.

The long-range plan is intended to consist of both policy and three tiers of projects. However, the legislature typically turns recommended policies into project lists.

5.4 Identified Strengths and Weaknesses

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during the workshop.

Strengths

- The legislature cannot remove or add projects to the STIP after being approved.
- LDOTD district engineers have good channels of communication and coordination with local governments.
- Every year LDOTD inventories 6,000 road study sections to create a list of deficiencies and determine needs. This information is shared with the districts to prioritize.

Weaknesses

- Project costs are sometimes greatly underrepresented in order to be passed by the legislature. For example, construction of a new bridge over the Mississippi River was estimated at \$50 million for the legislature and \$150 million for LDOTD.
- The legislature views the parishes' special local option sales taxes as an imposition on their authority, especially by urban parishes, as it diminishes support for statewide sales taxes that support rural regions.
- Despite having rapport with their district office, local governments indicate a level of distrust towards the central LDOTD office.

• Bonds are rarely used and are considered to be the "kiss of death" for projects.

5.5 Success Stories

The Transportation Infrastructure Model for Economic Development funds various projects to assist non-road modes. In addition to funding airport and port improvements, it provided rural areas with \$4 million in surface transportation program funds to do site-specific improvements, such as on system routes that have dangerous curves or intersections. It includes reconstruction and overlay, and has received positive feedback from both local elected officials and citizens.

6.0 Mississippi

Mississippi contains 151,279 lane miles of roads, 133,958 lane miles of which are rural, and 7,264 of these rural miles are on the National Highway System. Eighty-four percent of rural roads are locally owned. Mississippi's rural transportation planning process is considered to be a blend of bottom-up and top-down methods.

6.1 The Rural Planning Process

Mississippi has 10 planning and development districts that are increasingly involved in transportation planning, but have no formal roles or responsibilities. Most planning is conducted at the county level. Each county has a superintendent, who is the principal planning authority and serves on the planning and development district's board. The superintendent determines how the county's fuel tax funds will be spent, and works with the MDOT engineer to select projects.

The Mississippi Department of Transportation (MDOT) is divided into six districts, which fall into three Mississippi Transportation Commission districts: northern, central, and southern. Each MDOT district engineer is responsible for all planning activities and works with the counties. The district engineer reports to the MDOT chief engineer/deputy director at the central offices.

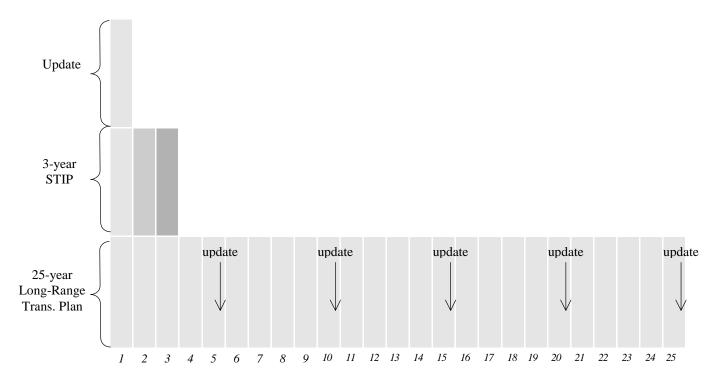
MDOT is governed by the Mississippi Transportation Commission, which consists of three representatives, one elected from each district. It addresses transportation issues at bi-monthly meetings and approves the STIP. The commission elects its own executive director, who in turn appoints the MDOT chief engineer.

Principal Rural Planning Activities

- County superintendents determine needs and prioritize their projects with the assistance of MDOT district engineers.
- MDOT develops the three-year STIP based on input from the district engineers, and submits it to the transportation commission.
- The STIP is approved by the transportation commission and submitted to the legislature for final approval.
- Projects in the STIP are advertised three times for input, and notices are sent to mayors and regional leaders. MDOT representatives meet with local elected officials and residents affected by the project to discuss the impacts and possible alternatives. A public hearing can be held upon request.
- MDOT updates the long-range policy plan every five years.

Exhibit 6a illustrates Mississippi's transportation planning process.

Exhibit 6a: Rural Planning Integration in Mississippi



Local Elected Official Involvement

Local elected officials may participate in the rural transportation planning process by working with their local government to develop plans, and by joining their planning and development district to turn the local plans into regional plans.

6.2 Programming and Funding for Rural Area Decisions

State gas tax revenue is divided between the state and counties. MDOT allocates 6.5 cents of the gas tax to counties based on population, road miles, and other factors. Counties can also levy a special local option sales tax for transportation purposes, although few counties opt for this due to its unpopularity. A four-lane road program absorbs most of the state's share of funding.

Federal aid is distributed to counties by the state aid division, which must be matched at the local level. Property taxes also help fund local roads. One urban and two rural counties in gaming areas receive \$15 million annually from gambling revenue for road improvements; MDOT receives \$40 million.

6.3 Major Planning Issues

The following major rural planning issues were identified during the workshop.

 Mississippi has a rapidly growing gaming industry, and traffic counts have tripled in some regions.

Counties and the state worked together to conduct feasibility studies and provide the necessary transportation facilities. Both the counties and the state receive gaming tax revenue in order to build and upgrade routes. Gaming-relating projects are discussed at public meetings and coordinated with local governments, although the process has not been as smooth in rural regions as it has in more urban areas.

• Some planning and development districts are more involved in transportation planning than others.

Planning and development districts with MPOs have detailed plans, update them, and do not stray from them. Districts without MPOs do not have the same planning resources or a process to imitate.

• Counties are less interested in regional planning efforts than cities.

Some counties are resisting regional planning efforts because they already have strong control over surface transportation program (STP) funds and do not want to be told how to spend their money or relinquish authority. As a result, planning and development districts find it difficult to develop regional plans without county participation.

6.4 Identified Strengths and Weaknesses

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during the workshop.

Strengths

- Local governments have significant control over local planning and programming.
- The planning and development districts are working with MDOT and the National Association of Development Organizations to establish a transportation advisory committee and work programs.
- There is good coordination and integration of plans between MPOs and surrounding rural counties.

Weaknesses

- Little planning input is received until the project selection or right-of-way acquisition stages.
- There is strong public sentiment against mandated local planning, and planning is not required for all cities and counties.
- Local elected officials are reluctant to utilize their special local sales tax option due to the small revenue it generates, and view it as "political suicide."
- Much of Mississippi's road system was built in the 1940s, and it is more expensive to update those highways than to build entirely new ones.

6.5 Success Stories

- The Advancing Highways for Economic Development program has improved the safety of hundreds of miles of roads and is almost completed. The program provided funds to improve over-capacity or accident-prone areas, and widen some highways to four-lanes. Analysis is currently being conducted on 600 more miles of highway to see if they should also be widened. The final phase of the program is to acquire right-of-way. Due to the program, Mississippi has more miles of four-lane highway per capita than any other state. It has also been essential in attracting gaming industries to the state.
- The Delta Area Rural Transit System began with two vans as a medical service shuttle, and has grown to 15 vans that transport a wide variety of clients to work, casinos, schools, doctors, and other locations. The Delta council also oversees a legislative effort to provide rural health services transportation and enable the entire population access to medical facilities. Jackson State University is also helping with this project.

7.0 South Carolina

South Carolina contains 134,728 lane miles of roads, 110,946 lane miles of which are rural, and 6,278 of these rural miles are on the National Highway System. Thirty-four percent of rural roads are locally owned. South Carolina's rural transportation planning process is considered to be a blend of bottom-up and top-down methods.

7.1 The Rural Planning Process

South Carolina has 10 councils of governments, which were given transportation planning responsibilities in 1993 when the South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) reorganized. All 46 counties belong to a council. Each council of governments has a transportation advisory committee that reviews and prioritizes projects using a ranking formula. The department provides each council of governments with \$25,000 a year for planning purposes.

SCDOT is divided into six districts. The department has four staff to assist the councils of governments in planning, and intends to add on four more such staff. SCDOT is primarily charged with highway planning, but coordinates to an extent with other modes. It plans for and funds bridges and interstates separately from the regional process.

Principal Rural Planning Activities

- The councils of governments hold meetings with the public and local elected officials
 to gather input on transportation needs. Each transportation advisory committee
 prioritizes projects based on a ranking formula, which the council of government
 board adopts and forwards to the SCDOT.
- The SCDOT develops the five-year STIP from the 10 regional project lists. The STIP is broken down by council of governments, each with its own project list and budget, and is then presented to the transportation commission for approval.
- After the transportation commission gives tentative approval, the STIP is circulated back to the councils of governments for a public review period.
- After reviewing and incorporating comments, the STIP is given final approval by the transportation commission.
- The STIP is returned to the councils of governments for a public comment and review period. The transportation commission then gives final approval.
- SCDOT plans for an additional five years beyond the STIP for a ten-year program.

Exhibit 7a illustrates South Carolina's rural transportation planning process.

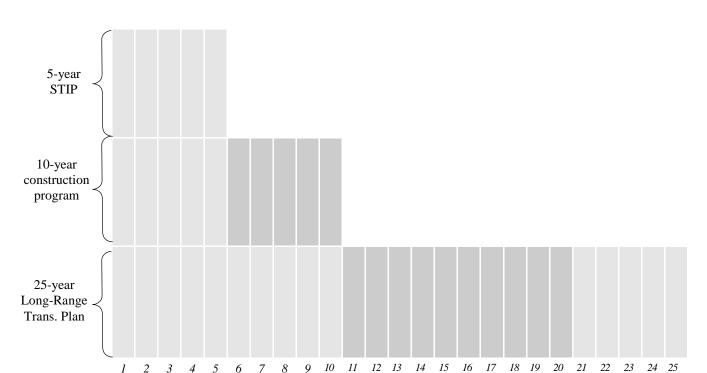


Exhibit 7a: Rural Planning Integration in South Carolina

Local Elected Official Involvement

Local elected officials may participate in the rural transportation planning process by developing plans for their local jurisdiction and by participating in their council of governments. State legislators are required by law to serve on the board of their council of governments.

7.2 Programming and Funding for Rural Area Decisions

South Carolina combines National Highway System (NHS), STP, and minimum allocation funding and then suballocates it. SCDOT shares 2.06 cents of the gas tax with counties. Counties can also levy a special options sales tax for transportation purposes – citizens vote on a specific list of projects – but only three counties have passed it.

A maximum of one-quarter of 1% of the gas tax, or \$5 million, is allocated to transit. The legislature also set aside 4 cents of the gas tax for improving mobility and safety. However, much of this funding has been diverted, such as after Hurricane Hugo.

Transportation commissioners have a \$25 million pot of funding to allocate at their discretion. Generally, legislators and local governments whose projects do not receive regional funding petition for this money.

7.3 Major Planning Issues

The following major rural planning issues were identified during the workshop.

- There is no comprehensive planning agency for the entire state. State agencies are fairly autonomous and do not coordinate planning.
 - South Carolina hopes that the councils of governments will fill this need, as they have representatives from multiple modes and numerous agencies. In addition, a small pot of money has been recently set aside for intermodal connectivity projects.
- SCDOT oversees one of the largest state highway systems, about two-thirds of all the state's roads.

To relieve some of the burden, the department is returning state roads to local jurisdictions as fast as it can.

7.4 Identified Strengths and Weaknesses

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during the workshop.

Strengths

- Although the transportation commission has the authority to accept or reject projects selected by the councils of governments, they have yet to deny any local plans.
- Local elected officials are very participatory and provide significant feedback and input.
- There is no required format for councils of governments. Each has a different advisory committee and project selection process that best suit its region.

Weaknesses

- Transportation planning in some areas may have become too localized and are not done in a regional context. There are fewer projects with regional links. For example, a road that could have connected two towns instead only was constructed to a school.
- Public transportation services are scattered and typically operated by agencies for the elderly or social service programs.
- Prioritizing projects has been a difficult and argumentative process for a few councils of governments.

7.5 Success Stories

The councils of governments have allowed citizens to be actively involved in the project selection and prioritization process. Previously, SCDOT was criticized for not working on needed projects and spending money poorly. Since the establishment of the councils and the suballocation of funding to them, the department has received positive feedback and improved their image.

8.0 Workshop Findings and Conclusions

8.1 Similarities

Consensus was reached by the Alabama workshop participants in many areas, most notably regarding public involvement, project development, and funding. These similarities are listed below.

- Local elected officials are actively involved in local and regional transportation planning.
- Citizens have the power to prevent undesirable projects or initiate desired ones through local planning efforts.
- Rural planning organizations are an effective tool in educating the public on transportation, growth, and development issues.
- Rural planning organizations must compete with metropolitan areas for money, and transit with other modes, with the department of transportation acting as arbitrator and distributor of funds.
- State departments of transportation would like to see increased flexibility with funding and fewer regulations.
- Regional planning organizations with MPOs have a funding and planning advantage over regions that don't border urban areas.

8.2 Differences

Differences between the states were also noted, which tended to center on governmental organization, regulations, and the programming process. These differences are listed below:

- States vary from taking a top-down approach to rural planning like Louisiana, where the state legislature makes project decisions – to states that have a bottom-up approach, such as Florida.
- While counties are the backbone of local planning efforts, some counties resist joining into regional planning and others accept it.
- Funding for transit varies considerably, from only federal funds to 15% of the transportation budget. Public transportation planning also differs from being done on a statewide to countywide basis.

- Some rural planning organizations struggle to find planning funds, while others are provided with more extensive resources.
- Some rural planning organizations have a purely advisory role, if at all, while others actively develop, plan, and program their transportation projects.
- There is wide variation in the extent to which the rural plans affect the prioritization and selection of projects. Some plans are incorporated into the STIP, and others are only reviewed for standards.

Attachment A. Participants

Alabama Workshop

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Middle Georgia Regional Development Center

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Birmingham Regional Planning Commission, AL

Rod Wilburn Consultant

Day Wilburn Associates, Inc., GA

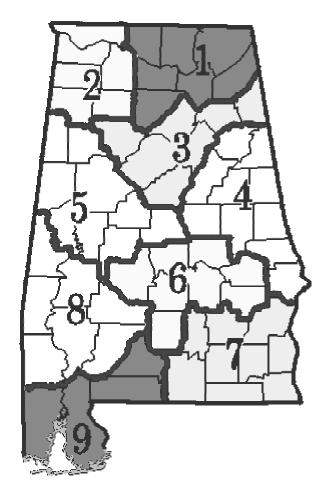
Russell J. Wimberly Executive Director

South Alabama Regional Planning Commission

Attachment B. Maps

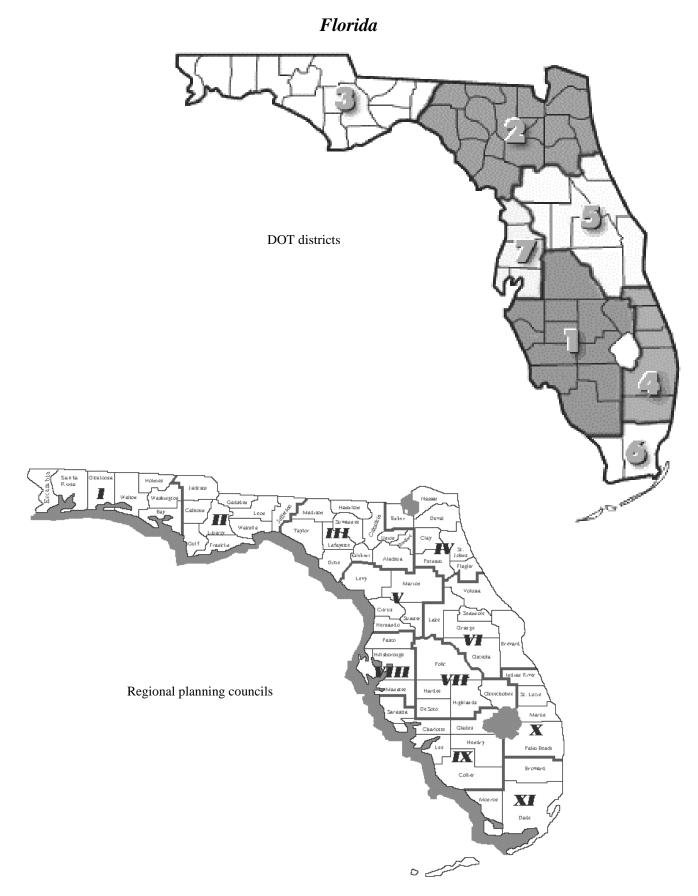
Alabama

DOT districts



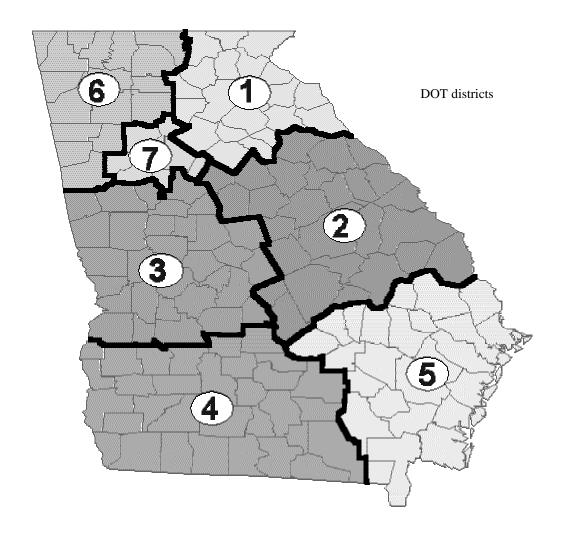
Regional planning commissions

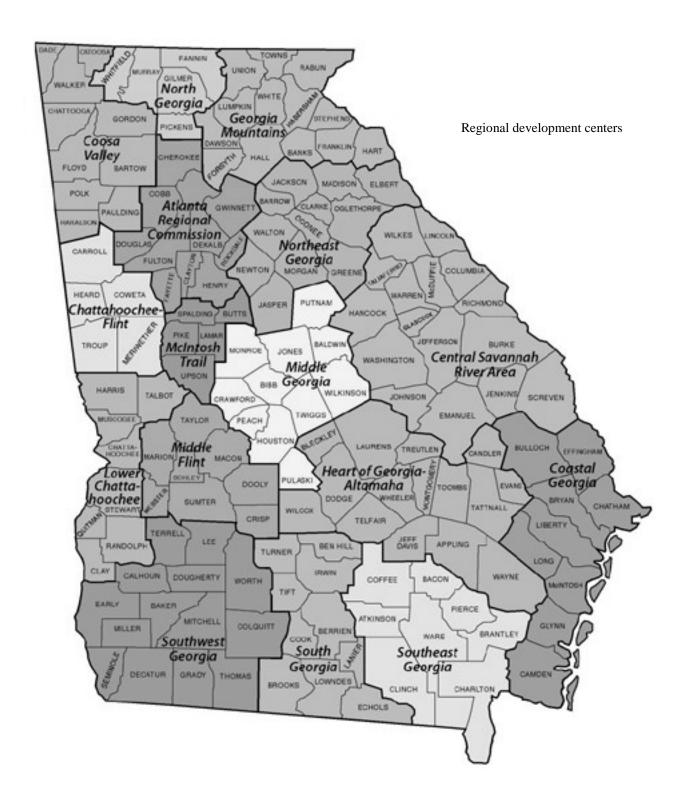




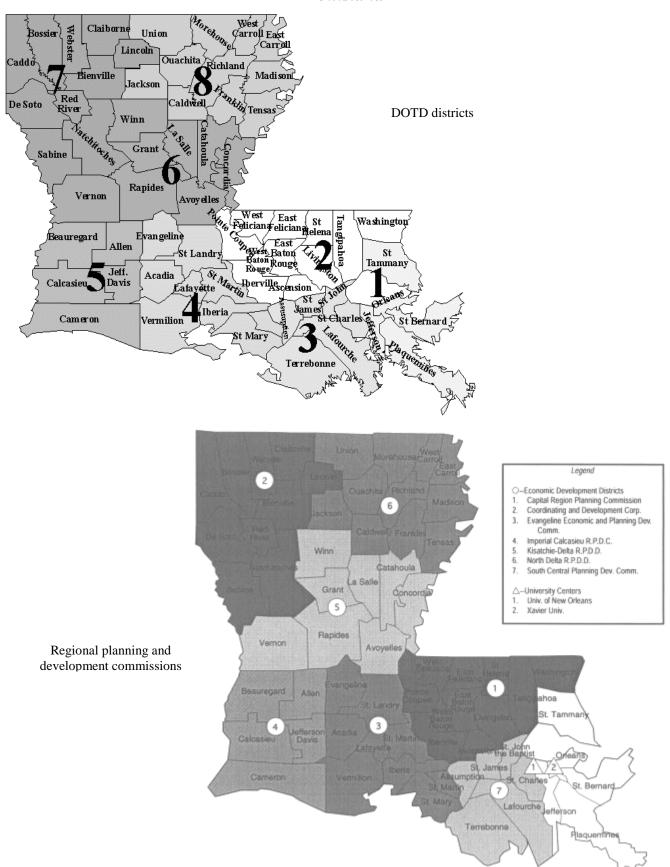
DYE MANAGEMENT GROUP, INC.

Georgia





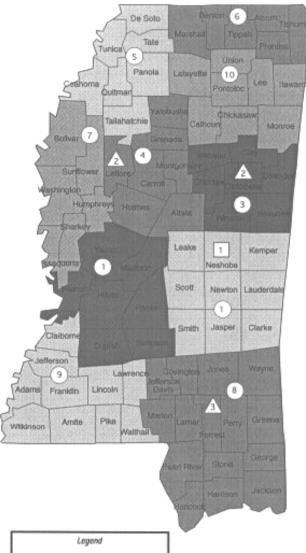
Louisiana



Mississippi

DOT districts LAFAYETTE 1 litawani CEASAW MONROE CETTER 3 KEMPER CZARKZ JONES GREEN! CE CR CE STONE JACKSCE HARRISO

Planning and development districts



- O--Economic Development Districts

 1. Central Mississippi P.D.D.

 2. East Central P.D.D.

- Golden Triangle P.D.D. North Central Mississippi P.D.D.
- North Delta P.D.D.
- Northeast Mississippi P.D.D.
- South Delta P.D.D.
- Southern Mississippi P.D.D.
- Southwest Mississippi P.D.D.
- Three Rivers P.D.D.
- □--Indian Tribe Planning Grantees
- 1. Choctaw Indians, Mississippi Band
- △--University Centers
- Mississippi State Univ.
- Mississippi Valley State Univ. Univ. of Southern Miss.

South Carolina

